

THE PRIORY OF BELVOIR

According to the received tradition the priory of Belvoir was intended at first to be an independent abbey. It was begun by Robert de Todei, lord of Belvoir, on land near his own castle, in 1076; but, being hindered by secular employments from completing the work, he was advised by Archbishop Lanfranc to hand over the unfinished buildings to the primate's old friend and companion, Abbot Paul of St. Albans, for a cell to that abbey. The abbot was to complete the monastery and place four monks there to pray for the soul of the founder, who was received at the same time, with his wife, into the fraternity of St. Albans. ([fn. 1](#)) The agreement was carried out, and Robert de Todei was buried at his death in the chapter-house of the priory. ([fn. 2](#)) It never became a very large or important cell, but it had many honourable names amongst its benefactors, several of whom were buried, like the founder, in its church or chapterhouse. The first William d'Albini was laid in the chapter-house, and Oliver d'Eyncourt beside him. The second William d'Albini, and the fourth of that name, were buried in the priory church, with their wives. ([fn. 3](#))

There is nothing very unusual or striking in the history of the house. The church of Redmile, given to the priory by William d'Albini, ([fn. 4](#)) was claimed in 1258 by Robert de Roos and his wife, ([fn. 5](#)) , and, though the dispute was settled in favour of the prior, other members of the same family seem to have been discontented with this result, and were accused in 1295 of trespassing on the property of the monks at Redmile and Belvoir, of assaulting their men and carrying off their corn. ([fn. 6](#)) William de Roos, however, in 1308 made his peace with the prior, and granted him the advowson of the church of Woolsthorpe. ([fn. 7](#))

The list of priors of this house is a very long one. It seems that they were frequently changed or transferred to other cells. A few of them are worthy of special mention. Roger of Wendover, prior in the early part of the thirteenth century, was the first of the chroniclers of St. Albans, but at Belvoir he certainly did not distinguish himself, except by 'dissipating the goods of the church in reckless prodigality, and following in all things the footsteps of his predecessor, Ranulf the Simple, whom all men hold blameworthy for his scandalous dilapidations.' ([fn. 8](#)) He was deprived of his office by William, twenty-second abbot of St. Albans, in 1226. ([fn. 9](#)) William of Belvoir, second prior of that name, ruled the priory with great success during the difficult period of the great pestilence, and, in spite of the burden of debt which he inherited from his predecessors, left the house in good estate, having planted trees, repaired the conventual buildings, and performed many other good works. ([fn. 10](#)) Simon Southrey, prior in 1396, was recalled to the mother-house by Abbot John Moot, and made claustral prior there. ([fn. 11](#))

The monks of this house seem to have been frequently in a state of poverty and debt. Sometimes this may have been through the mismanagement of the priors, as in the case of Roger of Wendover; and the career of William of Belvoir, already noticed, shows how much can be done or undone in this respect by one man. But the revenues of the house were never very large, and when Abbot John Moot was collecting contributions from the cells to pay off the debts of the abbey to the king and the pope, Belvoir, like Wallingford, was only expected to send 40s., while Tynemouth sent £7 and Bynham £4. ([fn. 12](#)) Every cell was expected to pay something towards the expense of maintaining at Oxford scholars from the abbey, ([fn. 13](#)) and a small present had to be sent if possible to each newly elected abbot. ([fn. 14](#)) During the few years immediately preceding the

dissolution of monasteries this priory was not actually in debt or money difficulty, (fn. 15) but it had ceased to be able to support even four monks as at first. Richard Belvoir, a monk of the house, who was examined in 1538 with reference to the advowson of an appendant church, testified that for the last few years there had been no one living at the priory except the prior and himself, and that he did not remember having more than two or three companions at any time, who were sent to and fro at the discretion of the abbot of St. Albans. (fn. 16)

The cell of Belvoir was surrendered with the parent abbey in 1539. (fn. 17) Of its internal history very little can be traced. The priors, as in the case of all cells of St. Albans, were presented by the abbot and instituted by the diocesan, but the right of visitation was reserved to the former. (fn. 18) They took an oath of obedience to the abbot, promising to maintain the privileges of the mother-house, and not to alienate any property of the cell, or grant any corrodies, without leave. (fn. 19) They had, however, full jurisdiction over the brethren under their charge, presiding at their chapter, hearing their confessions, and inflicting suitable punishments when necessary. (fn. 20) Apostates from the cell were at first sent back to the abbey for their penance; but Abbot Thomas de la Mare, at the end of the fourteenth century, ordered that in future they should return to the house they had forsaken. (fn. 21) Priors of cells had to attend the yearly general chapter of the abbey, (fn. 22) and there is plenty of evidence that the cells were regularly visited by the abbot in person. (fn. 23) There are no records of any serious troubles at Belvoir which called for the abbot's notice, except the case of Roger of Wendover. A prior was removed at the end of the thirteenth century by Abbot John III, but the chronicler especially remarks that it was done without any sufficient cause. (fn. 24) During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries there were several very good priors in charge of Belvoir. We are especially told that the house was in good estate just after the great pestilence, when so many monasteries were in a disorganized and unsettled condition. William of Belvoir not only managed to clear off heavy debts, but set an example of true piety and devotion; and after thirty-three years of active life he resigned his office that he might spend the rest of his days like a true monk, in prayer and contemplation in his own cell. (fn. 25) It was at his own desire, too, that Simon Southrey, half a century later, was recalled to the mother-house, 'wearied with worldly cares,' and wishing for a more secluded life than he had perhaps found possible at Belvoir. (fn. 26) A later prior, Richard Hall, must have had a good reputation for orthodoxy, for in 1453, when heresy was so rife, he received a licence from Bishop Chedworth to 'preach the word of God' anywhere in the diocese. (fn. 27) John Hatfield, prior from 1465 to 1480, was also held in some esteem at the mother-house, for he was deputed by the abbot to settle certain disputes in the troublesome cell of Tynemouth. (fn. 28) John Guildford, during the same century, had the privilege of burial in St. Albans Abbey, 'on account of his merits.' (fn. 29) The record of this house during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries seems therefore to be good, so far as we can judge. At the time of the dissolution alms were still distributed to the poor at the priory gate every week to the value of 43s. 4d. annually; on Maundy Thursday, 6s. 8d. in addition, and on anniversaries of different benefactors, 51s. 4d. (fn. 30)

The original endowment of Robert de Toden included the vill of Horninghold (Leics.), and 4 carucates of land near the castle of Belvoir, with tithes in divers places. (fn. 31) William d'Albini and other benefactors added the churches of Horninghold, Barkestone, Redmile, Claxton, Plungar, Swinford, Ashby, and Hose (Leics.), with Tallington and Aubourn (fn. 32) (Lines.). The churches of Redmile, Swinford, and Ashby were lost before 1277, (fn. 33) but the others were still held by the priory in 1534. (fn. 34) No large benefactions were made later, except a

legacy of £55 16s. 8d. from John de Belvoir, canon of Lincoln, for whom a chantry was undertaken by the monks. ([fn. 35](#))

The prior in 1303 held part of a knight's fee in Uffington, Tallington, and Caswick, and one-eighth in Aubourn. In 1346 the former holding was said to be one-fourth of a fee. ([fn. 36](#)) In 1534 the clear value of the priory was £98 19s. 5d. in temporals and spirituals. ([fn. 37](#))

Priors of Belvoir

Temmaer, ([fn. 38](#)) occurs *temp.* Hen. I

Brientius, ([fn. 39](#)) occurs *temp.* Stephen

John, ([fn. 40](#)) occurs 1169

Simon, ([fn. 41](#)) occurs between 1174 and 1195

John, ([fn. 42](#)) occurs between 1183 and 1195

Nicholas, ([fn. 43](#)) occurs 1195

Simon, ([fn. 44](#)) died 1204

Ranulf the Simple ([fn. 45](#))

Roger of Wendover, ([fn. 46](#)) occurs 1224, deposed 1226

Martin of Bosham, ([fn. 47](#)) instituted 1226, occurs 1240

Geoffrey, ([fn. 48](#)) occurs 1251

Ralf of Wellington, ([fn. 49](#)) occurs 1264 and 1269

William of Huntingdon, ([fn. 50](#)) occurs 1270 and 1277

Reyner, ([fn. 51](#)) instituted 1277, occurs 1285

Minion of Barton ([fn. 52](#))

Roger of Hanred, ([fn. 53](#)) occurs 1287, died 1295

Peter of Maydenford, ([fn. 54](#)) instituted 1295, transferred 1299

John of Stakethorn, ([fn. 55](#)) occurs 1303 to 1317

William of Belvoir I, ([fn. 56](#)) instituted 1319.

John of Kendal, ([fn. 57](#)) instituted 1320, occurs 1329

William of Belvoir II, ([fn. 58](#)) instituted 1333

William of Stenington, ([fn. 59](#)) occurs 1361 to 1367

Richard of Belvoir, ([fn. 60](#)) occurs 1367 to 1384

Stephen, ([fn. 61](#)) occurs 1386 to 1390

Simon Southrey, ([fn. 62](#)) occurs 1390 to 1396, resigned about 1397

John Savage, ([fn. 63](#)) instituted 1397

William Hall, ([fn. 64](#)) instituted 1400, occurs to 1414

John Guildford, ([fn. 65](#)) occurs from 1414 to 1423

John Wyteby, ([fn. 66](#)) occurs 1430 to 1441

Robert Ouresby, ([fn. 67](#)) instituted 1433

William Alnwick, ([fn. 68](#)) instituted 1435

Richard Hall, ([fn. 69](#)) occurs 1453

John of Banbury, ([fn. 70](#)) occurs 1459

John Hatfield, ([fn. 71](#)) occurs 1465 to 1480

Anthony Zouch, ([fn. 72](#)) occurs 1485

John Thornton, ([fn. 73](#)) occurs 1498

Robert Ashby, ([fn. 74](#)) occurs 1498

John Clare, ([fn. 75](#)) occurs 1516

Ralf Eytdn, ([fn. 76](#)) occurs 1520

Henry, ([fn. 77](#)) occurs 1525

Thomas (Randyll ?), ([fn. 78](#)) occurs 1531

Thomas Hamtyll ([fn. 79](#))

Footnotes

- 1 Sloane MS. 4936, fol. 44. *Gesta Abbatum* (Rolls Ser.), i, 57.
- 2 Dugdale, *Mon.* ii, 289, Charter ii. From a register of the priory, containing a list of the benefactors and patrons of the house buried in the church or chapter-house.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Sloane MS. 4936, fol. 46.
- 5 Ibid. fol. 82.
- 6 Pat. 23 Edw. I, m. 10 *d.*
- 7 Sloane MS. 4936, fol. 99.
- 8 *Gesta Abbatum* (Rolls Ser.), i, 270-4.

- 9 Ibid. and Linc. Epis. Reg. Rolls of Wells.
- 10 Sloane MS. 4936, fol. 129. The debt is said to have amounted to £733, and Prior William contrived to leave a balance of £40 to his successor.
- 11 *Gesta Abbatum* (Rolls Ser.), iii. 436.
- 12 Ibid. 468.
- 13 There are several records of penalties imposed on priors for default of this payment (Ibid. ii, 312, 448). Belvoir paid 32s. 9d. in the time of Whethamstede (John de Amundesham, *Ann. Mon. S. Albani* (Rolls Ser.), ii, 309).
- 14 *Gesta Abbatum*, ii, 187; iii, 468.
- 15 An account of receipts and expenditure for Belvoir in the year 1527, when Cardinal Wolsey was abbot *in commendam*, shows that there were no debts at that time (Dugdale, *Mon.* iii, 292).
- 16 Sloane MS. 4936, fol. 138.
- 17 Gasquet, *Hen. VIII and the Engl. Monasteries*, ii, 308 (date of surrender of St. Albans).
- 18 *Gesta Abbatum* (Rolls Ser.), i, 275-7.
- 19 Ibid. ii, 443.
- 20 Ibid. 95.
- 21 Ibid. 415.
- 22 Ibid. 447.
- 23 Notices of visitations are scattered through the chronicles of St. Albans, and it is specially noticed of Abbot William of Hey worth that he, being in debt at his accession, lived for some years at Bynham, Hatfield, and Belvoir, to lessen the expenses of his household, but did not visit the cells *capitulariter* (Ibid. iii, 494).
- 24 He did the same to all the cells except Wymondham (Ibid. ii, 51).
- 25 Sloane MS. 4936, fol. 129.
- 26 *Gesta Abbatum*, iii, 436. At the next election Simon Southrey, being then prior, received four votes, though he never became abbot (Ibid. 486-7).
- 27 Linc. Epis. Reg. Memo. Chedworth, 5 d.
- 28 *Registrum Willelmi Alton* (Rolls Ser.), ii, 239.
- 29 John de Amundesham, *Ann. Mon. S. Albani* (Rolls Ser.), i. 437.
- 30 *Valor Eccles.* (Rec. Com.), iv, 116.
- 31 Sloane MS. 4936, fol. 44.
- 32 Ibid. 46. Vicarages were ordained for all these Leicestershire churches under Belvoir in the time of Hugh of Wells (Linc. Epis. Reg. Rolls of Wells).
- 33 Archbishop Kilwardby inspected the charters of the priory, and pronounced their title good in the cases of Claxton, Hose, Plungar, Barkstone, Tallington, Aubourn, and Horninghold; the others are not mentioned (Sloane MS. 4936, fol. 86). The church of Woolsthorpe was granted in 1308 for a short time, and that of (Hogges) Norton also; but neither of these gifts was in perpetuity (Ibid. fol. 99, 111).
- 34 *Valor Eccles.* (Rec. Com.), iv, 116.
- 35 Sloane MS. 4936, fol. no. An interesting benefaction of books from Sir Richard de Luton is printed in Dugdale, *Mon.* ii, 292, and shows us what was considered a valuable contribution to a monastic library in the fourteenth century. Besides divers service books, it comprised a tractate on grammar, homilies for a year, Æsop's Fables, a tractate on the seven sacraments, a book of 'cases in which a priest cannot absolve his own parishioner,' another

on the art of the *serpent*, another on the manner of mixing and making colours, another on ' the virtues of simple medicines' with many antidotes of proved virtue, &c., for which gift the anniversary of the donor was to be kept with *Placebo*, *Dirige*, and *Requiem*, each priest in the monastery saying one mass, and those in minor orders fifty psalms each.

- 36 *Feud. Aids*, iii, 166, 167, 210, 211.
- 37 *Valor Eccles.* (Rec. Com.), iv, 116.
- 38 *Rep. on MSS. of Duke of Rutland* (Hist. MSS. Com.), iv, 130.
- 39 *Ibid.* 99.
- 40 Madox, *Formulare Angl.* 251.
- 41 *Rep. on MSS. of Duke of Rutland*, iv, 113, 146.
- 42 *Ibid.* 43.
- 43 Dugdale, *Mon.* iii, 287. The list in Dugdale is from various sources, but where the names in it conflict with entries in the Linc. Epis. Reg. or other reliable sources, they have been passed over.
- 44 *Ibid.*
- 45 *Gesta Abbatum* (Rolls Ser.), i, 270.
- 46 *Rep. on MSS. of Duke of Rutland*, iv, 143; and Linc. Epis. Reg. Rolls of Wells.
- 47 *Ibid.* where he is called ' Martin, brother of Winemer, formerly archdeacon of Northants' (*Rep. on MSS. of Duke of Rutland*, iv, 131). He is called Martin of Bosham in *Gesta Abbatum* (Rolls Ser.), i, 274.
- 48 Dugdale, *Mon.* iii, 287.
- 49 *Ibid.*
- 50 *Rep. on MSS. of Duke of Rutland*, iv, 153; Sloane MS. 4936, fol. 87.
- 51 Linc. Epis. Reg. Rolls of Gravesend; and *Rep. on MSS. of Duke of Rutland*, iv, 125.
- 52 Dugdale, *Mon.* iii, 287.
- 53 *Rep. on MSS. of Duke of Rutland*, iv, 133. The two following names in Dugdale's list are omitted, as Roger's death is noted under the institution of Peter of Maydenford.
- 54 Linc. Epis. Reg. Inst. Button, 21. He was made prior of Beaulieu 1299 (*Ibid.* 104).
- 55 *Cal. of Pap. Letters*, i, 601; *Rep. on MSS. of Duke of Rutland*, iv, 104, 121, 149.
- 56 Linc. Epis. Reg. Inst. Dalderby, 79.
- 57 *Ibid.* 359; *Rep. on MSS. of Duke of Rutland*, iv, 120.
- 58 Linc. Epis. Reg. Inst. Burghersh, 50d.
- 59 Dugdale, *Mon.* iii, 287; William occurs also in 1346 (*Rep. on MSS. of Duke of Rutland*, iv, 146,). This may be either William of Belvoir or of Stenington.
- 60 *Ibid.* and *Rep. on MSS. of Duke of Rutland*, iv, 122 and 173.
- 61 *Ibid.*
- 62 *Ibid.* and *Gesta Abbatum*, iii, 436.
- 63 *Ibid.*
- 64 Linc. Epis. Reg. Inst. Beaufort, 13 d.; and *Rep. on MSS. of Duke of Rutland*, iv. 173.
- 65 *Ibid.*
- 66 Sloane MS. 4936, fol. 137.
- 67 Linc. Epis. Reg. Inst. Gray, 10.

- 68 Ibid. 13.
- 69 Ibid. Memo. Chedworth, 5 d.
- 70 Dugdale, *Mon.* iii, 287.
- 71 *Registrum Willelmi Albon.* (Rolls Ser.), ii, 30, 145, 239.
- 72 Dugdale, *Mon.* iii, 287.
- 73 Ibid.
- 74 Sloane MS. 4936, fol. 137.
- 75 Dugdale, *Mon.* iii, 287.
- 76 Ibid. He is also said to occur 1530; but the deposition of Richard Belvoir in 1538 shows that Priors Hamtyll and Randyll had been the last two in office, and one had ruled the house nine years.
- 77 *Rep. on MSS. of Duke of Rutland*, iv, 112.
- 78 'Thomas' is given in Dugdale *Mon.* iii, 287, under 1531; it is uncertain whether his name was Randyll or Hamtyll.
- 79 Sloane MS. 4936, fol. 138; *Linc. N. and Q.* v, 36. In a list of obits of priors of this house are named also John Langley, Andreas, John Biwell, and John Revey; as the date is only given by the month and day, it is uncertain where they should be placed. In the *Rep. on MSS. of the Duke of Rutland*, iv, 130, 137, and 146, Priors Eustace and Richard of St. Clare occur also undated.